

NEH Humanities at Community Colleges
Anne Arundel Community College and St. John's College
Bridge to the Liberal Arts through Primary Source Texts "BLAST"

I. Intellectual Rationale

Anne Arundel Community College (AACC), a comprehensive, suburban community college, is uniquely situated just seven miles from St. John's College (SJC), located in historic downtown Annapolis, Maryland, where the undergraduate program is a liberal arts curriculum focused on the most important books and ideas of Western civilization. Although only fifteen minutes apart by car, the educational experiences are a world apart as measured through the lens of student populations, experiences, and educational offerings. This proposal seeks to bridge the divide through student-centered humanities focused programming created by collaborative efforts with SJC faculty, referred to at St. John's as "tutors," and AACC faculty.

Just as AACC places "learning as its central mission,"¹ SJC describes itself as "a true liberal arts college [that is] first and foremost a community of learning,"² where students "grapple with fundamental questions that confront us as human beings."³ Moreover, the institutional philosophy driving AACC is premised upon "the basic convictions of our country's democratic ideal: that individuals be given full opportunity to discover and develop their talents and interests...."⁴ Finally, AACC's strategic plan⁵, *Engagement Matters: Pathways to Completion*, establishes an institutional goal of "Increas[ing] completion by transforming the culture of the institution to ensure equity and that the college remains student-ready and committed to academic excellence." Through this program, together the tutors and faculty will develop a Great Books curriculum and seminar style teaching methodology to be integrated

¹ Anne Arundel Community College Mission Statement: www.aacc.edu/about/mission-and-vision/

² St. John's College website: www.sjc.edu/academicprograms

³ St. John's College website: www.sjc.edu/about

⁴ Anne Arundel Community College Mission Statement: www.aacc.edu/about/mission-and-vision/

⁵ Anne Arundel Community College Strategic Plan: <https://www.aacc.edu/about/mission-and-vision/strategic-plan/>

within existing AACC humanities courses to support a pathway for AACC students to enroll as full-time students at SJC.

The overall theme of the project is Equity and Inclusion, two of the key values of Anne Arundel Community College. This program will enhance understanding of these themes, particularly in the traditions that have influenced and become embodied in the democratic ideals of the United States, through a Great Books curriculum. Both AACC and SJC firmly believe that an increased understanding of and interaction with these themes help students become active citizens in an engaged and inclusive society and in the intrinsic value of traditional knowledge and grappling with difficult and age-old questions in the 21st century. We believe that all students should have access to this knowledge.

II. Content and Activities

SJC is known as a “Great Books” school; all instruction takes place through the reading and discussion of primary texts. Through this collaboration, we hope to bring aspects of this approach to students in core humanities classes at AACC. The project will work on two levels: enhanced content and enriched pedagogy. Our approaches to both content and pedagogy are chosen to help AACC students attain the background successfully to make the transition from community college to SJC or any other liberal arts college.

Regarding content, the goal of this collaboration is to enrich the classroom experience for AACC humanities students with a greater exposure to primary texts. SJC and AACC will work together to produce syllabi and course work that will most effectively leverage the strengths of SJC in primary texts and seminar learning to enrich the experience in the AACC classroom. All additional syllabus material will reflect the themes of Equity and Inclusivity, and the texts read and discussed in the different classes support one another to give student participating in this

program a coherent educational experience. For ENG 101 and 102, we propose using a deliberately interdisciplinary selection of primary sources that will engage students in an exploration of the themes of Equity and Inclusion in the United States, meeting an expectation of the course that students learn to work with a variety of types of texts. In HIS 111, in the program's second year, syllabi will be developed that use the themes of Equity and Inclusion as a lens for an inquiry into Ancient and Medieval Western Civilizations, with particular attention to thinkers and historical models (such as Athenian democracy and Roman Republicanism) that have influenced the development of our current political system. Finally, in the program's third year, readings will be identified for PHL 111 that highlight the issues of Equity and Inclusion, (e.g. justice and our obligation to one another as citizens) with preference given to ones that influenced U.S. founders or that emerge from the American context. More detail, with sample texts for each class, is in Appendix 1b. At the level of the individual student, a high degree of comfort dealing with these primary texts is an important skill to build as part of the pathway toward transfer to a liberal arts college. On a broader, cultural level expertise with primary texts is part of what allows some groups to own and define what history looks like and what counts as knowledge. We believe that with some faculty guidance, students of all backgrounds can undertake the intellectual adventure of encountering these sources directly.

Regarding pedagogy, our goal is to give AACC students greater exposure to and practice in discussion-based learning. Through skillfully led discussions, students are enabled to become active collaborators in their own educations. They learn to approach difficult texts and complex issues thoughtfully. Students find their voices in classes where they are listened to respectfully and openly, challenged to support their positions but also helped to do so, where they work with their peers in class to form a community of dialogue in which everyone's voice matters. This

mirrors the civic participation of citizens in a functioning democratic society and enables the student to experience and reflect upon the ideals of equity and inclusion through the very process of their own participation in class.

This project, *Bridge to the Liberal Arts through (primary) Source Texts*, “BLAST,” proposes to establish professional development programming offered by SJC’s tutors to AACC humanities faculty with three objectives: (i) to engage AACC students in Great Books humanities learning around the themes of equity and inclusion; (ii) to deepen faculty knowledge of seminar-style pedagogy using primary source Great Books in humanities teaching; and (iii) to establish pathways and financial incentives for AACC students to transfer to SJC or other liberal arts institutions.

The professional development programming will consist of three 2-week summer seminars (calendar years 2020, 2021, 2022) led by SJC tutors. AACC faculty will attend the professional development program to learn how to teach from Great Books and how to lead seminar-style instruction in their classes at AACC. They will participate as students in model seminars on some of the texts chosen for their new syllabi, thus gaining both familiarity with the content and ideas about how to work with the specific text in a discussion-based class; these model seminars will be supplemented by opportunities to reflect explicitly on the methodology and to practice leading groups themselves, with feedback from the tutors.

Student exchange programming, beginning in the fall of 2021 and continuing in each of the following fall and spring semesters, will be an integral component of the project. This programming will expose AACC students in BLAST to a liberal arts institution through structured visits to SJC. They will take part in student-led text-based discussions in mixed groups of SJC and AACC BLAST students, have opportunities to interact with undergraduate

and graduate students, learn about the SJC undergraduate program, and tour the SJC campus. Through these interactions, AACC students will gain a firsthand experience of culture and student life at a premier liberal arts institution.

The AACC courses identified for the BLAST Program (Composition 1 and 2, Western Civilization, and Introduction to Philosophy) were selected because of their natural affinity to a Great Books curriculum. The composition, history, and philosophy courses are naturally suited to teaching and learning from primary sources. AACC students who enroll in the BLAST Program will benefit from faculty expertise, by learning from original texts, and through the universal transferability of these general education courses regardless of their baccalaureate institution.

AACC's strategic plan "Pathways to Completion" is explicit in its goal of ensuring that upon completion of an associate's (transfer) degree, its students will be provided institutional support to transfer. AACC recently established two offices in direct support of transfer, The Transfer and Partnership Office, with the goal of forming "2+2" articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities, and the Assistant Dean of Transfer Studies, to oversee the Transfer Studies associate degree. Both offices, along with professional advisors and the financial aid office at AACC, will work to ensure seamless and affordable transfer from community college to four-year institutions.

SJC's unique baccalaureate experience requires students to complete four years at their institution. Since SJC does not accept transfer credit, an important component of the BLAST Program is a tuition discount equal to the cost of a year's tuition at AACC for participants who matriculate to SJC. SJC is a leader in making liberal arts education affordable and accessible; last year a tuition reset made SJC the most affordable liberal arts college in Maryland, and one of the

most affordable in the United States. In addition to a new, much lower, tuition price, SJC is committed to offering substantial need-based financial aid. More than 20% of the entering class of 2022 are Pell recipients. SJC is motivated to participate in the BLAST Program for two primary reasons: (i) its authentic commitment to the Great Books curriculum, and, (ii) its desire to increase the diversity of its student population. Both AACC and SJC have much to gain from the partnership, but the primary benefit is for the students we hope to share.

Over the three-year life of the grant, the project will involve four faculty tutors and six students from SJC, with an intended audience of six humanities faculty members from AACC and capacity for 400 student enrollments at AACC with 40 students anticipated in the first semester of the program gradually increasing to 100 students in the last semester. Please see Appendix 1a for the detailed Plan of Work and Schedule of Activities.

Upon successful completion of the project in January 2023, the program has the potential to bring a Great Books learning experience to hundreds of community college students in the decade to follow through a commitment by both institutions to build a sustainable model that will carry indefinitely into the future. Please see Appendices 3 and 4 – Letters of Commitment.

III. Project Personnel

The lead project personnel are Dr. Alicia Morse, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts, Anne Arundel Community College and Dr. Emily Langston, Dean of the Graduate Institute, St. John's College, and. The lead SJC tutors are: Matthew Caswell, Karin Ekholm, Rebecca Goldner and Margaret Kirby. With more than 50 years combined experience in teaching throughout the all-required academic program, and a demonstrated interest in engaging others in the reading and discussing "Great Books," they are ideally suited to work alongside the AACC faculty on this project. The lead AACC faculty are: Steven Canaday, Timothy May, David Meng, and Marjorie

Paoletti. These AACC faculty are experts in both pedagogy and curriculum and have over 75 years of combined teaching experience in higher education. Two of the faculty (May, Meng) have direct experience with SJC and all the AACC faculty are personally committed to a Great Books curriculum. AACC History and philosophy faculty will be identified in the first year of the program. CVs for all faculty are contained in Appendix 2.

IV. Institutional Context

The humanities disciplines have a lengthy and strong presence at AACC. The full-time humanities faculty at AACC consists of 62 faculty across the disciplines of English, communications, performing arts, history, visual arts, and philosophy, with 42% holding terminal degrees. Course offerings are robust within each of these humanities disciplines which includes one dozen literature courses, U.S. History and African American History, Ethics, Ancient Greek Philosophy, Comparative Government and Politics, and Ethnic Conflict. AACC offers sixteen world languages including Latin, Greek, and Biblical Hebrew. A complete listing of general education humanities courses can be found in the online AACC College Catalog.⁶

Student enrollments in humanities courses and related degree programs at AACC are robust. Each fall and spring semester over 2000 students enroll in college composition courses. The most popular degree program at AACC, the Associate of Arts in Transfer Studies, provides students the flexibility to customize their degree program to include a concentration in any of the Humanities disciplines. The Liberal Arts Associate of Arts degree, although much smaller in enrollment, has enrolled a respectable number of students in recent years. Enrollments in select humanities courses targeted for this project and select program enrollments for the most recent three academic years are provided Appendix 6.

⁶ AACC Arts and Humanities General Education Courses:
https://catalog.aacc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=25&poid=8970

SJC is recognized nationally and internationally for its rigorous curriculum based solely on the reading and discussion of foundational texts. The college is fundamentally interdisciplinary: all students study all subject areas, and all faculty “tutors” are required to teach in all parts of the curriculum. The Annapolis campus has a small student body of approximately 475 undergraduates and 60 graduate students. The student: faculty ratio is 7:1. 38% of the class of 2022 are from underrepresented/underserved groups. SJC is among the top colleges in the country for sending students on to graduate or professional school.

SJC faculty are highly credentialed with more than 90% holding terminal degrees and are ideally suited for collaboration on this project, as all classes at the college are conducted through discussion of primary sources. Their knowledge of the sources and the method, and of the way in which the two support each other, is rooted in a deep and extensive practice as well as ongoing community reflection. See Appendix 1b for a detailed list of proposed readings for the identified courses in composition, history, and philosophy.

In summary, St. John’s College and Anne Arundel Community College faculty and staff are highly qualified to carry out this project. SJC is home to the premier Great Books curriculum in the U.S. and AACC offers robust curriculum and student enrollments in the humanities. AACC seeks to promote equity and inclusivity in all its work and has a proven track record of success (see Section V). Finally, this collaboration seeks not only to involve SJC faculty with AACC faculty, but to promote engagement among students of the two institutions. This is particularly important on a practical level as part of the bridge, or pathway, for AACC students; through visits to the SJC campus, where they will engage discussions with SJC students that will also be arranged and facilitated by students, they will more easily begin to envision themselves making the transition to SJC or another liberal arts college. This collaboration will also be of value to

the tutors and students of SJC and faculty at AACC. Broadening discussions to include more interaction with others outside of the immediate context of either institution re-energizes curricular and pedagogical work through new perspectives at both institutions, and opens up tutors, students, and faculty to questions these texts raise for readers coming from a variety of different life-experiences to recognize and question the habits of reading and interpretation that emerge in long-standing communities.

V. Follow-Up and Dissemination

Content and classroom activities developed for this project will be embedded into existing AACC humanities courses, including select required and elective general education courses; faculty will continue to utilize the project's pedagogical approaches, ensuring that this new approach to liberal arts learning touches most current and future students.

AACC enjoys a national reputation among community colleges, and as such, has many networks to disseminate information. AACC is member of Achieving the Dream (ATD) and was recently honored with Leader College Status⁷ and is a Board Member of the League for Innovation in the Community College.⁸ AACC received INSIGHT Into Diversity's Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award in recognition of outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion for the previous three years and has been recognized for its work on equity initiatives by the Association of American Colleges and Universities.⁹ St. John's College is a founding member of the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC) and an active participant in ACTC's Liberal Arts Institute.¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.achievingthedream.org/leader-college>

⁸ <https://www.league.org/about/board-of-directors>

⁹ <https://www.aacu.org/peerreview/2017/Spring/Bolton>

¹⁰ <https://www.coretexts.org/institute/>

It is the intent to use these connections to present the program, its development, and its successes and lessons learned at conferences such as ATD's "Dream Conference," The League's "Innovations Conference," the ACTC Conference, and at conferences traditionally attended by faculty and administrators from liberal arts colleges and community colleges.

VI. Evaluation

The evaluation of the project will occur periodically throughout the 3-year grant cycle and include: (i) assessment of student learning, (ii) student satisfaction surveys, (iii) tutor/faculty annual reflections, and (iv) student course completion, program retention, and transfer metrics. Student course completion will measure success by the percent of students earning grades of A, B, or C. Student retention will be measured by the number of students who persist in the program by number of Great Books courses completed. Student transfer will be measured by number and percent of students in the BLAST program who transfer to 4-year liberal arts institutions.

The evaluation plan seeks input from students, faculty, and students on the value and effectiveness of the program. Assessment of student learning and student satisfaction surveys are standard processes at AACC and will be used to inform this program. Tutor and faculty reflections will be collected and analyzed at three key points each year, following the summer institute and at the end of each semester at AACC, in order to learn and grow during the three year grant cycle. Institutional measures including course completion, program retention, and transfer metrics will be a significant measure of the success of the program. A complete plan is included in the Plan of Work/Schedule of Activities (Appendix 1a).